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SUBJECT: PIR GAILANI: AUGUST ELECTION OKAY ONLY IF KARZAI  
NOT CANDIDATE

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Fresh from a Palace election date discussion, Pir Gailani, head of the politically and religiously influential Gailani family, told the Charge on 2/24 that he and other political leaders would support President Karzai staying in office until an 8/20 election only if Karzai announced he would not run for re-election. Responding to the Charge's point that Karzai is both likely to and has the right to run for a second term, Gailani said he would work with other political leaders to find another solution. Gailani acknowledged security conditions preclude holding a legitimate election before 5/22.

¶2. (SBU) Karzai convened a 2/24 meeting at the Palace attended by, among others, First VP Massoud, Second VP Khalili, Lower House Speaker Qanooni, Upper House Speaker Mojaddedi, MP Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, Independent Election Commission Chair Ludin and Gailani. Karzai announced there that if he were to step down on 5/22, elections would have to take place in April, to avoid a gap in the presidency. Gailani claimed all attendees except for Dr. Ludin supported Karzai's plan.

¶3. (SBU) Gailani contended that if the election were held in August, Karzai would use his position as incumbent to the disadvantage of other candidates. Responding to the Charge's question how Karzai's incumbency was a problem for an August election but not a May election, Gailani acknowledged Karzai would undoubtedly win a spring election because no other candidates are prepared. The solution was for Karzai not to run for re-election, he reiterated.

¶4. (SBU) Charge outlined the U.S. position: resolution of the executive authority issue required Afghan political leaders (including Karzai and key opposition leaders) to work together to find an agreed-to political solution. The United States would advocate no specific outcome, but would insist the eventual solution preserve the 8/20 election, maintain a strong government during the peak fighting season, and support the authority and goals of the Constitution. Charge also told Gailani the USG will review its relationship with all political parties in light of their efforts to resolve this situation. Gailani acknowledged this point, saying "if our international friends do not support us we will not succeed" and "a car without gas cannot run."

¶5. (SBU) Gailani plans to assemble a group of political leaders including the speakers of both houses of parliament next week to resolve the election date and presidential continuity issues. The best outcome of this discussion would be a parliamentary announcement preserving the 8/20 election date and detailing a politically satisfactory answer to the presidential continuity issue, Gailani said.

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